Viewpoint: ‘Artificial intelligence poses a whole new threat to the already dangerous practice of heritable human genetic modification’

The rapidly approaching application of artificial intelligence (AI) technology [is] being brought to bear on gene editing, a merger that a recent RAND report predicts will result in “a societal evolution.” Similarly, AI pioneer and multi-centi-millionaire Mustafa Suleyman makes a strong case in his book The Coming Wave, written with Michael Bhaskar, that there is “an emerging cluster of related technologies centered on AI and synthetic biology” that will “both empower humankind and present unprecedented risks.”

AI has become a catch-all term for modern technologies, some of which have been developing for years. Among the most consequential, at least potentially, is embryo selection. AI’s success in this process is already being used as a selling point.

For decades, some fertility clinics have offered not only sex selection but also choice of eye color, and avoiding certain single-gene genetic diseases. That technology has developed into polygenic risk score (PRS) selection; that is, a single number derived from an algorithm that summarizes the estimated effect of hundreds or thousands of genetic variants on an individual’s risk of a particular condition or trait. The first PRS baby was born in 2020.

What next? Well, one woman already claims to be carrying “the first baby who will be selected for his intelligence.” (The interview was in French though the couple are American.) The parents may be disappointed—some experts call the process a scam—but when will they know? The check will have cleared long before.

This is an excerpt. Read the full article here